

CHRIST'S TEACHINGS AT THE BEGINNING OF PASSION WEEK

BIBLE TEXT : Matthew 21:12-32
LESSON 196 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing., ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 21:12-32 (KJV)

¹² And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

¹³ And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.

¹⁵ And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased,

¹⁶ And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

¹⁷ And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.

¹⁸ Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.

¹⁹ And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

²⁰ And when the disciples saw *it*, they marvelled, saying, How soon

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

The First Day of the Week

The last week before Christ's crucifixion had come. Soon He would go back to Heaven and leave His followers to preach the Gospel of His Kingdom. Through the three and a half years of His ministry He had told them many things that would make them good citizens of the heavenly Kingdom, and He had yet a few more lessons to teach.

This week had opened with the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The streets of the city had echoed with shouts of: "Hosanna to the Son of David," and "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest" (Luke 19:38). It seemed that the day had come when Jesus would proclaim Himself King of the Jews. Surely their long-awaited Deliverer was coming into power!

But no! The Roman soldiers went on their way as before. The kingdoms of this world continued, for His Kingdom was not of this world. He entered Jerusalem as the Prophet had foretold, "lowly, and riding upon an ass."

The Passover Season

It was the time of the Passover, and the Jews had come from the surrounding countries to offer their sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem. The streets were thronged with devout worshipers, and in the Temple courts people noisily bustled about, preparing for the coming sacred holidays.

God's House Dishonored

Think what Jesus saw when He entered the Temple, His Father's house, the house of prayer! Instead of praying, the people were doing business, buying and trading animals for sacrifices, exchanging their foreign money for that of Jerusalem. And so dishonest were the dealers that Jesus called them thieves. They were robbing God of the love and devotion they owed Him. They were more interested in forms and ceremonies than in true worship.

Into all this confusion walked Jesus. This was the week in which He would be crucified, and already the Jewish leaders were planning how they might capture Him. But as He came into the Temple alone, no one touched Him. He stood before them and boldly condemned them for their merchandising. He called above the noise, "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."

Over went the tables of the moneychangers, and coins clattered to the floor! The Lord of the Temple was there, and the people were powerless before Him. The doves, let out of their cages, flew away, and there was nothing for the merchants to do

is the fig tree withered away!

²¹ Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this *which is done* to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

²² And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

²³ And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

²⁴ And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.

²⁵ The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?

²⁶ But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.

²⁷ And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

²⁸ But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.

²⁹ He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.

³⁰ And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I *go*, sir: and went not.

³¹ Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father? They say unto

but follow after them.

The House of Praise

How quiet the Temple was when all the shouting traders had gone, along with their dissatisfied customers. The lowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep were stilled.

Then what do we hear? The children are singing, "Hosanna to the Son of David." They are praising Jesus who has come to save the lost, to bind up the brokenhearted, to give peace to the troubled soul. The glory of God has descended into His house, and His dear Son heals the lame who come to Him, and gives sight to the blind. This is what God had meant for His Temple. This is the house of worship, the place of prayer.

How careful we should be to honor the house of God! We must remember when we enter our church that we are in the presence of God and we have come to worship Him. He wants the children to sing His praises just as they did that day long ago in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Children Called

In our day we find that many parents have forsaken the worship of God and do not go to church. Often the children will give their hearts to Jesus ahead of their father and mother. The Lord wants citizens for His Kingdom, and even if the older people refuse to come to Him, He will call the young to serve Him. Many of them will receive an eternal reward in Heaven because they love Jesus. He said of the children, "Forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such *is* the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14).

Jesus used a child as an example of a citizen of His Kingdom: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me" (Matthew 18:3-5).

Moses had given the Israelites careful instruction about teaching their children God's commandments: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). He did not think it was too early to teach the children about the Lord while they were yet young.

When children feel the call of God, no one should say that they are too young. Children often understand more quickly than adults how to be born again. The simplicity of the Gospel appeals to the heart, and the child will believe that Jesus forgives his sins while the older person is still trying to reason it out.

If you feel the Lord calling you, answer Him with all the love and devotion of your heart. Promise Him your life for now and for ever. He loves you and wants the praises from your heart and lips. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1).

The reason the rulers in the Temple did not enjoy the songs of the children was that the rulers were jealous of the honor that was given to Jesus. He told the priests that because they had failed to glorify Him and recognize Him as the Messiah, the Father had used the mouths of the children to sing His praises.

Neither did these religious leaders like to hear the gratitude of the people who were healed of their diseases and restored to strength. They who were supposed to be the ministers and help

him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

³² For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen *it*, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

the people would rather hear the quarreling of the moneychangers and sheep peddlers.

The Barren Fig Tree

The next morning when Jesus and His disciples were returning to Jerusalem from Bethany, where they had spent the night, He was hungry; and seeing a fig tree, He looked for some fruit to eat. But there were only leaves. He was disappointed, and He said to the tree, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever," and the tree dried up.

When we become the children of God we are His planting, His trees. After a while He will come to see if we are bearing fruit. Some may think that such fruit is good works, but Paul tells us that the fruits of the Spirit are these: "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22). Of course, if we have this fruit of faith and love we will show many good works to prove that we have it. The Apostle James wrote: "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). That is what Jesus expects to find on His "trees."

The Tree Pruned

If Jesus comes to one of His "fig trees" and finds some of the fruit, such as faith and love and peace, but finds little meekness and long-suffering, He will say that that tree needs pruning and cultivation. He will give it a chance to bear more fruit. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15:2). When the Lord "prunes" His children, it hurts; but what joy comes afterward to those who profit by it! "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11).

If the "tree" still refuses to bear fruit, then it is cut down. Jesus spoke a parable to illustrate that: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" But the caretaker answered, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down" (Luke 13:6-9).

Think of the mercy of God to give us another chance after He has found no fruit, or just a little fruit! It should encourage us to consecrate our lives more and more to God so that good fruit will grow in us and be pleasing to the Savior.

Works Through Faith

The disciples were surprised to see the fig tree wither so soon. They had seen Jesus work miracles, and they had heard Him speak the stormy waves to a calm. But again they were astonished at His power over nature.

Jesus tried to help His followers to understand that it was faith in God that brought the results. He told them that if they believed in God they could do the same things He did. Whatever they asked of the Father in His name, they would receive if they believed. But "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews

11:6). All that we do for God will be accomplished only through faith. If God can work only so far as we believe, how far can He work through me? through you?

Abiding in Him

Jesus did not say that He would answer prayers to satisfy our selfish desires. He said: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). When we are abiding in Him we will ask things according to His Word, and then we have faith that He will do it. "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (I John 3:21, 22).

Faith is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and we must have it if we want the Lord to be pleased with His "fig tree." As we study His Word our faith will increase. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). And when we use the faith that God gives us, it will increase and we will believe Him for greater things.

In this closing week Christ prayed for His disciples that their faith would not fail. That prayer extends to us today. May we live in His Word so that our faith will grow and we will be strong to do the works He commands us to do!

QUESTIONS

- 1 What do we call the last week before the crucifixion?
- 2 What happened on the first day of the week?
- 3 What did Jesus find in the Temple when He arrived?
- 4 What were the priests planning to do to Jesus?
- 5 How did Jesus show that He was not afraid of them?
- 6 What happened in the Temple after all the sinners were driven out?
- 7 Tell a little of Jesus' notice of children.
- 8 How can we do things for the Lord?